

Abstract of the Disclosure

The present invention reduces the cost of a minimally configured network device by providing a network device with a distributed switch fabric. Such a network device locates a portion of the switch fabric functionality on each forwarding card allowing the minimal network device configuration to include less than the entire switch fabric functionality. The cost of the minimal configuration is, therefore, reduced allowing network service providers to more quickly recover the initial cost of the network device. As new services are requested, additional functionality, including both forwarding cards and universal port cards may be added to the network device to handle the new requests, and the fees for the new services may be applied to the cost of the additional functionality. Consequently, the cost of the network device more closely tracks the service fees received by network providers.

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